



PLANNING DESIGN AND ACCESS STATEMENT

Change of Use of Public House with extended food provision (Sui Generis) to Function Venue (Sui Generis) and retrospective application for the removal of existing timber pergola and erection of an aluminium pergola with glazed panels

The Barn Tea Green, Stony Lane, Luton LU2 8PS

Reference: 23987 R03

June 2025



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1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The following statement has been prepared on behalf of the owners of the Barn at Tea Green (formerly known as the White Horse Public House). The Barn is located at Stony Lane, Tea Green, LU2 8PS.
- 1.2 Tea Green is situated to the east of Luton and is a small hamlet made up of several residential properties arranged around a triangular open space. The Barn sits at the eastern side of the settlement adjacent to a large water tower. The building sits side on to the road and has been previously extended to create an enclosed function room alongside the road. To the rear is an outdoor seating area, an external bar, and a large car park.
- 1.3 The site is located within the Green Belt, which washes over Tea Green. It should be noted that the land to the west running to the outskirts of Luton has been designated as a strategic housing site and will eventually be developed for 2,100 homes, new schools, and a local centre. In the next 10 years, Tea Green will be on the edge of an expanded urban area of Luton, so will be vastly different to what it is now.
- 1.4 The White Horse closed in 2022 as the business was not viable in its present form. A trial run to operate the business as a public house resulted in just 6 walk-in customers over a 5-month period. It was evident that the public house element of the business was making a loss and would not be viable, not even covering staff and operating costs. The business is not supported locally, evidenced by the volume of objections from neighbours to the last planning application. Again, this makes it difficult to operate as a public house, without the support from regular local clientele.
- 1.5 Following extensive refurbishment by the new owners, it was decided to make the most of the function room element of the Barn and expand this offer with a new garden pergola. Accordingly, planning permission is sought for a change of use from a public house with extended food provision (sui generis) to a function venue (sui generis) for holding weddings, celebrations and events for individuals and the corporate market.
- 1.6 Retrospective planning permission is sought for the demolition of the existing timber pergola and its replacement with a convertible aluminium pergola with glazed panels in a similar location to the rear of the building. The extended seating offered by the pergola allows larger functions to take place, which has broadened the appeal of the venue to a wider range of faiths, cultures and communities from the surrounding area, who require larger gatherings for weddings and functions.



2 SITE DESCRIPTION AND PLANNING HISTORY

Site Description

- 2.1 Tea Green is located to the east of Luton. All of the area between Tea Green, Mangrove Green and Cockernhoe, back to the outskirts of Luton has been allocated as a strategic housing expansion area for up to 2100 homes.



OS extract showing the location of the application site

- 2.2 The application site is located on the eastern side of Tea Green, within a small hamlet of residential properties surrounding a green space. To the east of the site is a water tower, whilst to the west are residential properties. To the south are open fields that wrap around the rearmost section of the site.
- 2.3 The main part of the building containing the bar sits side on to the road, facing south-west. On the rear of that part of the building are various kitchen, cold stores, and back of house rooms, which have been



added over time, are disjointed and difficult to work in an efficient manner. This has a negative impact on the operation and functioning of the pub.

- 2.4 On the north-east part of the site, running alongside the road is a purpose-built function room, connected to the pub with a linking vestibule reception area, opening onto the enclosed seating area and deck. The southeast section of the site is covered in gravel and provides extensive car parking.
- 2.5 An aerial view of the site can be seen below showing the existing building and function room, with the parking area to be rear.



Aerial view of the application site showing the existing building

Planning History

- 2.6 The planning history for the property is as follows:
- 2.7 Planning reference 82/01408/1 Retention of detached building at rear to be used for the receptions, conferences, and children's room. Approved 25 November 1982.
- 2.8 Planning reference 11/01657/1 Continued use of land for the siting of a marquee to form dining extension to public house. Approved 23 November 2011.
- 2.9 Planning reference 14/02907/1 Single storey side extension to create new function room (as amended by plan no. 04 Rev C received 12/1/15). Approved 13 January 2015.
- 2.10 Planning reference 15/00828/1DOC Condition 6 - Noise Impact Assessment (as Discharge of Condition of Planning application 14/02907/1 granted 27/11/2014). Approved 21 April 2015.



- 2.11 Planning reference 16/00620/1 Installation of extraction and filtration system on the rear elevation. Approved 21 April 2016.
- 2.12 Planning reference 23/01585/FP Single storey rear extension following demolition of existing rear element. Replacement first floor to provide 5 No. bedrooms for guest accommodation. Extension of basement. Approved 10 Jul 2024.



3 THE PROPOSED DEVELOPMENT

- 3.1 The proposed development is described as follows:

"Change of Use of Public House with extended food provision (Sui Generis) to Function Venue (Sui Generis) and retrospective application for the removal of existing timber pergola and erection of an aluminium pergola with glazed panels."

Principle of Development

- 3.2 Section 8 of the NPPF concerns the need to promote healthy and safe communities. It supports at paragraph 98 the following:

"To provide the social, recreational, and cultural facilities and services the community needs, planning policies and decisions should:

(a) plan positively for the provision and use of shared spaces, community facilities (such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses, and places of worship) and other local services to enhance the sustainability of communities and residential environments;

(b) take into account and support the delivery of local strategies to improve health, social and cultural well-being for all sections of the community;

(c) guard against the unnecessary loss of valued facilities and services, particularly where this would reduce the community's ability to meet its day-to-day needs;

(d) ensure that established shops, facilities, and services are able to develop and modernise, and are retained for the benefit of the community; and

(e) ensure an integrated approach to considering the location of housing, economic uses and community facilities and services."

- 3.3 The improvement and enhancement of an existing rural business, providing the community benefit of a social meeting space in a public house should be supported and planned for in a positive manner.
- 3.4 Section 6 considers the need to build a strong, competitive economy, in particular to achieve a prosperous rural economy, paragraph 88 states that:



"Planning policies and decisions should enable:

(a) the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of business in rural areas, both through conversion of existing buildings and well-designed new buildings;

(b) the development and diversification of agricultural and other land-based rural businesses;

(c) sustainable rural tourism and leisure developments which respect the character of the countryside; and

(d) the retention and development of accessible local services and community facilities, such as local shops, meeting places, sports venues, open space, cultural buildings, public houses and places of worship."

3.5 Planning decisions should enable the conversion of existing buildings to allow the sustainable growth and expansion of all types of rural businesses. Public houses should be supported and retained.

3.6 The nature of rural locations is discussed at paragraph 89, which states:

"Planning policies and decisions should recognise that sites to meet local business and community needs in rural areas may have to be found adjacent to or beyond existing settlements, and in locations that are not well served by public transport. In these circumstances it will be important to ensure that development is sensitive to its surroundings, does not have an unacceptable impact on local roads and exploits any opportunities to make a location more sustainable (for example by improving the scope for access on foot, by cycling or by public transport). The use of previously developed land, and sites that are physically well-related to existing settlements, should be encouraged where suitable opportunities exist."

3.7 It is evident that the White Horse public house is currently located to the east of Luton within a rural area. However, the character of this area will change over the next decade as 2,100 will be built up to the edges of Tea Green, so the site at that point would become previously developed land on the edge of the Luton built up area. As it stands, it is located within the hamlet of Tea Green, so is not an isolated location.

3.8 The application site is located within the Green Belt and as such the NPPF advises at paragraph 154 that:

"Development in the Green Belt is inappropriate unless one of the following exceptions applies:

b) the provision of appropriate facilities (in connection with the existing use of land or a change of use), including buildings, for outdoor sport, outdoor recreation, cemeteries and burial grounds and allotments; as long as the facilities preserve the openness of the Green Belt and do not conflict with the purposes of including land within it;

c) the extension or alteration of a building provided that it does not result in disproportionate additions over and above the size of the original building;"



- 3.9 The application site is an existing building that has been extended over time, partly in a planned manner, and partly seemingly in an ad-hoc manner. To the rear of the building was an outdoor seating area and decking, covered with a timber pergola. There is also an outdoor bar area serving the external seating.
- 3.10 The existing function barn has capacity for 100 seated guests and is used for weddings and functions. Planning permission was granted for the barn in January 2015, making the function use part of the operation of the public house with extended food offer (sui generis). The change of use sought by this application seeks to confirm the use of the premises as a function venue, which is also a sui generis use.
- 3.11 The public house is not a profitable or viable business and cannot continue to operate on over the bar sales. The function room element of the business was supporting the rest of the business and making up for a lack of bar sales. A 5-month long attempt to run the premises as a public house resulted in just 6 walk-in customers, which is completely inadequate to cover costs of staffing and utilities, let alone achieve a return on the business.
- 3.12 The site has been supported by the function venue since the barn was constructed in 2015, so this change of use only formalises what has already been happening. The only way that the business will survive and hopefully grow is to reduce costs and focus on the profitable elements of the business, improving them to make The Barn more competitive with other venues in the area.
- 3.13 The timber pergola has been removed and replaced with an aluminium pergola in a similar location, adjoining the function room. This allows the space to be used in a variety of ways, including added seating and dining for functions.

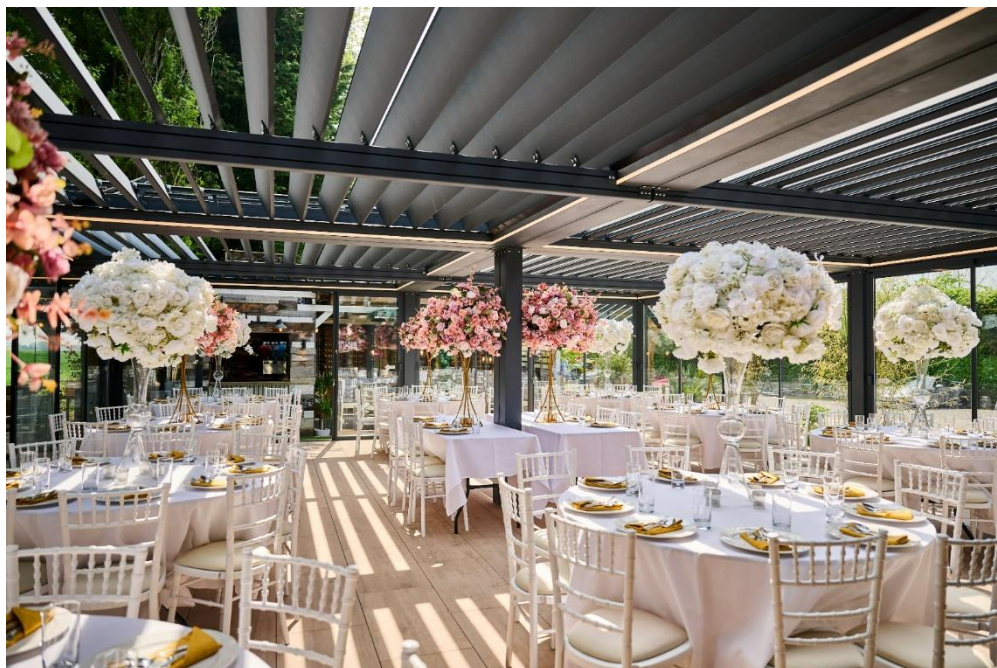


The outside of the new pergola

- 3.14 The addition of the covered pergola provides additional seating capacity to 200 guests and allows the venue greater flexibility and allows the venue to compete with other surrounding venues in Luton. The



pergola allows the barn to be converted to a dancefloor for an evening venue, with the option of the pergola used for quieter seating, either open during nice weather or closed if the weather is cold or inclement.



The pergola with the roof partially open set up for a wedding breakfast

- 3.15 There is no amplified music within the pergola, only quieter background music, function music is provided by the dedicated sound system within the Barn, which has been tailored to minimise external disturbance as far as possible.

Scale and Layout

- 3.16 The existing pergola had an area of around 57 m² and was around 10 metres long by 6 metres wide. Adjacent to the pergola were rows of enclosed pods installed during the pandemic to create covered outdoor spaces in accordance with the social distancing rules of the time.
- 3.17 The pergola and rows of pods have been removed and replaced with a new pergola, which is around 11.91 metres long and 8.76 metres wide. The new structure has a floor area of 104 m². The new structure has been positioned so that it adjoins the rear of the function room and provides an additional flexible seating area.
- 3.18 The change of use does not alter the scale of the rest of the venue or require any physical changes to the Barn.

Design

- 3.19 The pergola is constructed from dark grey anodised aluminium and has an opening louvred roof, which can be slid back to completely open the structure during nice weather. The roof can then be closed to



provide a degree of weather protection, extending the usefulness of the space compared to the previous timber pergola.

- 3.20 The sides of the structure have sliding glazed panels, which when opened create an outdoor space, but also offer protection from the wind and rain when closed.

Access

- 3.21 There is no change to the existing access onto Stoney Lane. The parking and turning arrangements are the same, with ample space available to turn a vehicle and exit the site in forward gear. The car parking area has been extended onto an existing area of gravel and rough ground to the rear of the existing car park. This area is already used for car parking as an overflow parking area.
- 3.22 The venue was already being used for functions in associated with the public house use. The change of use to a function venue does not alter the uses that take place, other than from a planning use class definition. Functions have taken place at the site since 2015 and before from a marquee and then the barn, so this change of use just formalises the balance of uses on the site.
- 3.23 Guests attending functions, due to the rural location of the Barn tend to organise mini-bus transport and taxi's, and whilst there is ample parking, the function venue places less demand on the car park and generates fewer individual trips due to the nature of the use.
- 3.24 The new pergola has a raised floor, which is level with the function room, so there is a level access to the existing building in accordance with disabled access requirements.

Flood Risk

- 3.25 The application site is located within Flood Zone 1 and is not at risk of flooding from any source, including surface water.
- 3.26 The proposals would not increase the risk of flooding to any properties surrounding the site.

Opening Hours

- 3.27 The planning permission (reference 14/02907/1) for the function room specifies variable opening hours for the business which remain in place. The specified hours are:

- | | | |
|---|-----------|---------------------|
| • | Monday | 11:00hrs - 01:00hrs |
| • | Tuesday | 11:00hrs - 01:00hrs |
| • | Wednesday | 11:00hrs - 01:00hrs |
| • | Thursday | 11:00hrs - 01:00hrs |
| • | Friday | 11:00hrs - 01:30hrs |
| • | Saturday | 11:00hrs - 01:30hrs |
| • | Sunday | 12:00hrs - 24:00hrs |

- 3.28 In addition to these hours, the condition specified the following variations:



"These hours apply each week of the year with the exception of:

Every Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday of each May Bank Holiday, Spring / Whitsun Bank Holiday and August Bank Holiday weekend.

Every Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday and Monday of each Easter Bank Holiday weekend.

Christmas Eve, Boxing Day and New Year's Eve.

On these days, the permitted hours will be extended from the standard closing time by one (1) additional hour."

- 3.29 We have reinterpreted the wording of the condition to simply the text which is slightly confusing as it is shown on the decision notice. These hours would allow functions to operate until 02:30 hours on certain days.
- 3.30 As part of the change of use application, we request that the hours of operation are varied to reduce the night-time hours, which are not needed and extend the daytime hours, widening the appeal of the venue to the corporate market for networking and training events.
- 3.31 The opening hours for the venue are requested to be changed to the following:
- | | | |
|---|-----------|---------------------|
| • | Monday | 08:00hrs - 01:00hrs |
| • | Tuesday | 08:00hrs - 01:00hrs |
| • | Wednesday | 08:00hrs - 01:00hrs |
| • | Thursday | 08:00hrs - 01:00hrs |
| • | Friday | 08:00hrs - 01:30hrs |
| • | Saturday | 09:00hrs - 01:30hrs |
| • | Sunday | 10:00hrs - 24:00hrs |
- 3.32 The venue would not necessarily be open at all times during these hours and is closed when no functions are taking place.



4 CONCLUSION

- 4.1 The Barn at Tea Green has been created from the former White Horse public house. The pub had proven to unviable as a stand-alone venue and requires considerable investment to deliver an enlarged and more functional kitchen, beer cellar, and first floor accommodation. The lack of localised custom, the size of the hamlet, and more appealing pub options in the surrounding area made the business unsustainable. The business was trading on reduced hours and only opened for a few days per week, before it then closed for period of 6 months prior to the sale.
- 4.2 Planning permission has been secured for improvement, however, the financial case for making such a considerable investment into a fledgling business has not yet been fully proven. As an interim stage, the business is making the most of the assets it has available, namely the function room, rear garden seating area and setting in this rural location.
- 4.3 The barn has been used as a function venue for over 10 years and effectively provided the mainstay to the rest of the business, providing the income to support the falling sales of food and drink within the bar. This change of use application recognises that the use of the site as a function venue is now the primary use of the site, it is simply not viable to operate it as a public house.
- 4.4 The glazed pergola supports the development of the function side of the business and allows a moderate investment to deliver a much-improved offer as a venue in a competitive market space. Having a venue that appeals to a wider range of communities and cultural requirements will ensure that the business has a broader appeal, essential to its' future viability.
- 4.5 The added seating capacity also ensures that the venue can compete with other large format wedding venues in the surrounding area. In addition, the earlier opening hours will ensure that the venue can attract corporate and business events, such as breakfast clubs and networking events.
- 4.6 This is an incredibly difficult time for the hospitality and function venue, which has been delivered multiple blows by the pandemic, the cost-of-living increases and now tax and national insurance rises, which has added to running costs and staff wages.
- 4.7 If we are to preserve these uses, then we ask the Planning Authority for their continued support as the business navigates a new avenue and establishes itself as one of the quality venues in the area.



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